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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT Monday, June 23, 1941.

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SUBJECT: "WINDOW-BOX GARDENS." Information approved by plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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A window-box garden can give your home lots of cheer in summer--lots of cheer both inside and out. Bright flowers and green foliage just outside the window-pane can bring such a summery atmosphere into the room! On days when you are tied indoors with housework, you can still see your garden just by glancing at the window. You may have no yard for a garden, but you can still have the pleasure of growing things if you have a window box.

Plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say that you need to give your window-box garden some special care and thought if you want to enjoy it all summer. To begin with, you want the right kind of box. You need a box built strongly, and anchored well to stand up under wind and weight.

Then, you want a box arranged somehow to conserve moisture. The sides of a window-box are exposed to drying, you see. Naturally, soil and roots dry out much faster than they do in a garden-bed. A neat easy way of conserving moisture is to have a galvanized metal container that fits down in the bottom of the box, and keeps in moisture where the mass of roots grows. These containers are especially helpful if the box stands on a window-sill or porch floor where you wouldn't want water draining out from the box.

Of course, you need good drainage in your box, too. You want the soil moist around the roots, but you don't want stagnant water standing around them after a rain, or after too much watering. So you provide for drainage just as you do in a flower-pot. Put a layer of coarse gravel or broken flower-pots in the bottom of

the box and cover it with sand. Now fill the box with rich fine topsoil, or with a mixture of soil, fertilizer, or well-rotted manure, and perhaps a little sand. Fill the box with earth up to an inch of the rim.

People living in city apartment houses are often most eager for window-box gardens. Unfortunately, in many cities gasoline fumes, soot, dust, and too little light make life difficult for plants. Plants with hairy leaves like petunias collect so much oily soot they choke. Delicate plants can't stand the heat of pavements and walls. And some flowering plants like nasturtiums are discouraged by too little light.

Plant scientists suggest that you may have better luck with foliage plants than with flowering plants in the city. English ivy is a good choice for foliage. It grows luxuriantly in the shade, and its smooth leaves don't catch the dirt as fuzzy leaves do. What's more, ivy leaves are easy to wash off. You may prefer the shorter, bushier types of ivy like the Merion or Pittsburgh varieties. Another vine for a window-box is vinca or Wandering Jew. Some varieties have reddish purple leaves; others are bright green. Vinca will let down a lovely curtain of foliage vines from your window box. Still other choices for foliage are the several kinds of small evergreens for sale at flower shops and nurseries. These may be arbor-vitae, spruce, boxwood, fir or cedar.

As for the flowers for a city window-box, better choose those that are <u>hardy</u>, <u>cheerful</u> and <u>cheap</u> to buy. Lantana is a good bloomer. It has flowers of yellow and orange. And it branches out and gives extra foliage. Another good bloomer is ageratum with its intense blue-purple flowers. And then, of course, there's the colorful geranium.

Whatever kind you choose, be sure each plant is strong and healthy and has well-established roots before you plant it in your window box. Set each plant in

firmly and water at once to settle the soil closely around the roots. Don't crowd the plants in. Give them room to grow. Put in stakes to support geraniums and other tall plants against the wind.

The chief care you must give a window-box is regular and thorough watering. A few glassfuls of water poured on top won't help the roots way down in the bottom. If you don't have subirrigation at the bottom of the box, soak the ground gently but thoroughly so that the moisture gets down to the very bottom. In the city you will need to spray the leaves of the plants with a syringe, or wash them with a wad of cotton dipped in water to remove dust and soot.

People who live in the suburbs or out in the country can grow a great variety of flowers in window-boxes. Petunias make a beautiful showing. Other blooms for country window-boxes are fragrant heliotrope, fuschia, dwarf marigold, pink and red begonias, daisies and nasturtiums as well as the faithful geraniums, lantanas, and ageratums.

Practical gardeners may even plant some kitchen herbs in a window-box garden. A bright border of parsley is decorative and useful, too. A few chives may go among the geraniums. Even mint will thrive if you keep your box thoroughly watered.

There, homemakers---there are just a few tips from plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for your summer window boxes.

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